

ZONEBEAT

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GUIDING A BUSINESS THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS



As nations around the globe take extraordinary steps to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses have launched their crisis management and contingency plans.

However, the rate at which the virus is spreading transcends many of the previously envisaged scenarios – even at multi-national companies with access to advanced technologies. For some sectors the challenges literally relate to survival, for others they mean maintaining operational continuity, and for others they involve responding to sudden huge increases in demand for services and products.

Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and leaders of businesses have a crucial role to play in helping their companies get through this crisis, and the decisions they are taking today – usually from their homes, connected digitally to their teams – will have a major impact on the future. In this article, the East London Industrial Development Zone's SOC Ltd (ELIDZ) CEO, Simphiwe Kondlo, sheds light on five valuable lessons he has learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the crisis still in full swing, the article does not seek to predict any outcomes, and neither does it wish to claim that the ELIDZ, in any sense, has “the answers”. Nevertheless, lessons from a leader within the dynamic Special Economic Zone (SEZ) environment are indeed important to share. This article kick-starts a series of articles, that are aimed at sharing some valuable leadership insights, which we will run throughout the year.

1. Crisis steering: Mobilize the crisis-response leadership vehicle immediately, using tested and drilled plans

The most important immediate priority when any type of a crisis strikes is to mobilize a Crisis Management Team (CMT) to manage the organisation's response to the crisis. Most organisations mainly focus on two things during the initial phase of a crisis: first, securing safety of employees; and second, maintaining an appropriate level of operational continuity, with other actions following on from this. Nearly most organisations have recovery-planning activities built into their crisis management procedures, which spring into action once the initial responses are underway and broadly under control.

In implementing a crisis response, some companies may follow underlying frameworks to guide efforts when, as with COVID-19, situations are changing rapidly, and a rigid plan is insufficient. For example, an Italian transport company has a three-pillar strategy – firstly, safeguarding the health of its employees and customers; secondly, ensuring the company's future (which especially means managing cash); and thirdly, defining and agreeing the necessary sacrifices with stakeholders to overcome the crisis. Similar to the Italian company and as the virus started ravaging like wildfire, we had to prioritise the lives of our employees, our customers and those that walked in through our doors.

2. Employees and customers: Focus first on employee and customer safety, and communicate intensively to enable behaviour adaptation

One cannot over emphasise the importance of securing employee and customer safety ahead of any other business considerations. In the first instance, this means making the right personal protective equipment and other materials, such as sanitizers, available to all staff – not just those with critical tasks. It also involves setting clear and unambiguous rules to ensure social distancing that cover all the organisation's business activities, so there is no room for doubt. Virtual working needs to be properly enabled with adequate Information Communication Technology (ICT) equipment and support. As such, communication to staff needs to be increased significantly – as a result the ELIDZ ran an internal Awareness Campaign on the virus and key business decisions which went out to staff every two days.

When uncertainty strikes there is need to keep staff informed, so that their understanding of the situation becomes even greater. For this to be effective, it should not be treated as a mere tick box exercise, but most importantly as a tool to keep staff informed as well as allay all fears. The Human Capital Management Sub-Unit supported by Corporate Communications and Marketing has a key role to play in creating awareness, educating and training staff, in order to ensure that they are fully engaged and understand what they are faced with.

3. Operational and business continuity to manage cashflow and ensure shareholders are equally aligned

Shareholders are equally as important as in-house staff, especially when one has government as a Shareholder where there is an integrated reporting system and shared goals. For us, the Business Continuity Planning (BCP) team maintained open lines of communication with the ELIDZ Board of Directors, where our shareholders and critical stakeholders sit. This made it easy for the two Shareholders (Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality) to be kept abreast of key business continuity decisions.

4. Other stakeholders: Engage actively with the government, authorities and community

Our engagement as an organisation was not only limited to our shareholders. In our engagements as the BCP team we also noted the importance of

communicating with other key external stakeholders, especially the other sectors of government, relevant authorities and local communities. The rapidly changing situation and myriad interconnections between the activities of government, local bodies, health and social services, infrastructure services, policing authorities, and the business itself mean continuous knowledge exchange is essential. These stakeholders are important to us in ensuring that our operations and those of our investors / tenants and service providers were not interrupted. This meant that we had to reach out to local authorities such as the police to inform them that some of our critical services staff members would remain operational during the lockdown period with the necessary permits to service those investors / tenants who were also deemed to fall within the critical services space during Level 5 of the lockdown period.

Equally as important, especially in this type of extreme crisis, was the realisation that we have an ethical and moral imperative to do the right thing for society at large, which transcends our core mandate. As an example, our Corporate Social Investment (CSI) Committee, through the ELIDZ CSI Programme partnered with the Ward 46 Committee to distribute food parcel vouchers to support about 100 pensioner-, orphan / child-led impoverished households from within the surrounding communities. This, as we recognise that as a responsible corporate citizen our mandate goes beyond what we know it to be and it includes providing the much-needed support to surrounding communities when tragedy strikes.

5. Recovery: Plan for recovery now, be positive and grasp new opportunities

While we are in the depths of the crisis it can sometimes be hard to maintain a positive attitude, particularly as the crisis's length and severity cannot be predicted. However, it is vital to emphasise the importance of positivity, in terms of both maintaining morale and ensuring the best – and fastest – recovery as possible following the

crisis. This does not mean false optimism and denying realities, but rather, acknowledging that although the crisis may not be over quicker than we anticipate, it will not last forever. We know and understand that some organisations are worse off than others, so in those organisations there will be little enthusiasm for working on recovery. Therefore, setting up a separate team to focus mainly on driving organisational recovery is one way to make progress.

As the ELIDZ, we recognise that the post-crisis business environment would present us with both new challenges and opportunities. These include the following:

- Building on experience of virtualization of the work environment to create new efficiencies, increasing productivity, and further extending “smart working” practices
- Greater automation and a more flexible work environment
- Leveraging the experience of rapid decision-making and delegation during the crisis to improve agility and responsiveness in the post-crisis world
- Better crisis preparedness and more effective business continuity risk management
- New impetus and preparedness to support a rapid ecosystem innovation to get faster solutions.

However, there is potential for much broader benefits: COVID-19 knows no geographical borders and attacks everyone, whether rich or poor, harming especially the weaker and older sections of society. Overcoming it is only possible if everyone works together and focuses on the greater good, even if that impacts their own lifestyle and freedom. Achieving this could deliver a positive legacy from the pandemic – with society globally benefiting from redoubled focus on collaboration, connectedness and community.

SUNDALE NAVIGATES THROUGH COVID-19 PANDEMIC TIDE

Today's Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), worldwide, are faced with overwhelming, competing challenges and uncharted waters as they continue to navigate the impacts of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Out of necessity, CEOs have prioritised “the now” supporting their people, clients and suppliers, addressing supply chain disruptions, stabilising revenues, aligning their businesses with the evolving market demands and identifying new growth pathways.

Business leaders are rapidly turning their attention to the next, a period of unpredictable and possibly muted economic recovery with new competitive threats and opportunities, and quite possibly a decade of the never normal, a new era defined by fast changing shifts in cultural norms, societal values and behaviours, such as increased demand for responsible business practices and renewed brand purpose. The ZONEBEAT Magazine (ZM) caught up with Sundale Dairy CEO, Pierre van Rensburg (PR), to learn about how he woke up one day and there

were fewer cars on the road, no flights for business travel as well as how this family-owned dairy business has been at the forefront of ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations in the region as well as its involvement in relief programmes in neighbouring communities.

(ZM) We understand that during the nationwide lockdown your business remained operational – how has the lockdown impacted your business?

(PM) At the start of the nationwide lockdown, in March and April 2020, we lost about 30% of our market. All our food services industry (FSI) customers supplying the hospitality sector were forced to close along with a number of our industrial customers that make cream liqueur.



Faced with this grim challenge and dire consequences, we had to quickly devise a new plan, as such we turned to our entrepreneurial and dynamic nature to target and capture new markets - this has started to bear fruits. In fact, it has enabled us to do everything possible to prevent job losses, short-time or wage cuts.

(ZM) What precautionary measures have you put in place since the start of the lockdown to ensure strict adherence to the COVID-19 regulations?

(PM) We implemented a rolling small group communication and training programme to equip our employees with as much knowledge as possible to help protect themselves at work, in transit and at home. As you are aware, the country experienced a major shortage of face masks and sanitizers in March, however, we were blessed to find a lady, who had to workday and night to handmade 2000 face masks for our staff. We also implemented a strong sanitizing regime through our whole supply chain and took a hard-line towards unnecessary visitors with screening of all non-staff coming onto site. The whole process has been successful thus far because we have had buy in from all our staff.

(ZM) What measures have you taken as an organisation to ensure that you remain operational and can meet your supply demands during the lockdown period?

(PR) Firstly, we secured an agreement with a service provider to supply us with five new busses to transport our staff for multiple shifts throughout the day. Additionally, we are quite fortunate in that we provide food products, and people need to eat and consume products like milk, yoghurt and cheese almost daily, which meant that there was constant demand for our products. However, it obviously becomes difficult on low margin products like ours, when you lose big amounts of turnover. Our team is resilient, like most South Africans, and we have kept at it and increased our focus on marketing and finding alternative markets. For example, in March, we lost all our mozzarella business as all the pizza houses had to close down operations. We then focused on finding those customers that make "heat and eat" pizzas for the retail supermarkets. We are now supplying a growing market for heat and eat pizzas with mozzarella cheese, supplying two of the major South African suppliers of this market segment. Our focus is now on getting closer to our customers by supplying more of our products into inaccessible rural areas with mobile Sundale depots. We understand that most of the region's population is vulnerable and not prepared to use public transport systems. We believe we can assist and service a need by getting our product to the deepest and most inaccessible areas of our province. We have also seen that imported products will be under pressure, we have already started with large developments together with the East London Industrial Development Zone SOC Ltd (ELIDZ) to produce more of our imported products locally. Announcements will soon be made on these exciting and large developments.

(ZM) There has been a notable move to virtual workstations to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, how has technology aided your operations during the lockdown period?

(PR) Without any doubt things have changed in this regard. Personally, I used to travel to the bigger metros around the country every week. I now obviously do not fly at all and have Zoom or Microsoft Teams meetings with customers and our sales teams around the country. This has been a revelation and improved productivity. I do, however, miss the face-to-face meetings and I do not think they will disappear completely.

(ZM) What lessons have you learned during these trying times and how will you use them going forward?

(PR) One lesson I have learned throughout this experience is that, one should always be prepared for anything! In business things change with a blink of an eye. Never think that something cannot happen, nobody ever expected COVID-19 and the ramifications thereof, however, my thinking is that we will all be better prepared next time. The operational, as well as health and safety procedures developed during this period will be documented and kept for when a similar crisis erupts.

(ZM) What are the positives that you can share with us emanating from this experience?

(PR) I think we can all appreciate that we need a world that is balanced, where people recognise the plight of others. We started a home delivery programme, where we sought to deliver a standard basket of our products - which contains milk, yoghurt, Maas, butter and cheese - door-to-door to customers in the Buffalo City area. Whilst the concept did not take off from a pure sales point of view, we noted increased interest on the dairy boxes from donors. We had domestic and international donors purchasing these and asking us to donate them to those in need. We roped in community leaders, ward councillors and charity organisations from the Kidds Beach area to assist with administering the donations. As a company we were very happy of the unintended consequences as we have raised in excess of R50 000 worth of donations. What this also showed are the acts of generosity that have been happening all over. I think this is a major positive and something that we can all continue with into the future.

Whilst the dairy firm has sought ways to alleviate the loss of sales, the CEO states that the company will have to double its efforts to achieve the much-needed growth, albeit under a gloomy economic outlook post COVID-19.



SETTING UP A PLANT DURING COVID-19

Starting up an aquaculture business in South Africa with the aim of producing Yellowtail Kingfish and Dusky Kob marine fish in a recirculating land based system is by no means an easy feat as it requires one to have the resolve to withstand all the teething problems associated with running a start-up business.

This is further compounded by the fact that as the setup process is underway, an unforeseen and earth-shattering crisis presents itself, thus forcing governments to take preventative measures to protect its citizens. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) - a global pandemic - forced many businesses, including Kingfish Enterprises (KE) - a relatively new tenant in East London Industrial Development Zone SOC Ltd (ELIDZ) precinct - to scale back on their plans as the nationwide lockdown was declared in South Africa.

According to KE Managing Director, Cris Dillon, prior to the initial lockdown, which was announced on 23 March 2020, by President Cyril Ramaphosa, the new plant's construction and commissioning were on schedule with no major delays forecasted. "The COVID-19 brought about a slight delay in the project, however because our business is still in the construction phase, we had to adjust our plans to align with government regulations on COVID-19," he said.

Dillon added that some of the challenges associated with a crisis of this nature involve a lot of uncertainty amongst investors: "Even though the construction is underway, one of our major investors has been hard hit by the virus to an extent that they had to re-evaluate their commitments across the board. We have been engaging with other investors to try bring

them onboard, while we find a mutually beneficial solution in relation to the matter."

With a great appreciation for employee wellness, Dillon stated that KE has implemented stringent safety measures to ensure adherence to government issued regulations on COVID-19.

"When onsite, it is mandatory that all our employees wear the required personal protective equipment and maintain social distancing measures at all time," he said.

However, Dillon also added that with the ban on interprovincial travel due to the ongoing nationwide lockdown, he has not been able to visit the plant for site inspection and which meant that he would rely on his partners on the ground for updates.

"With the ongoing ban on non-essential travel, technology has thrown us a lifeline. We turned to technology for team meetings, we use Zoom and Skype as I have not travelled to East London for eight weeks."

Kingfish has designed its facility to produce 300 tons per annum with roughly half Yellowtail and half Kob and should go to the market in a year's time.



TECHNOLOGY AT THE FOREFRONT OF A CHANGING WORLD

While this pandemic is arguably a black swan event, COVID-19 is a lesson on the importance of ensuring business agility.

The world is still coming to terms with the impact of COVID-19 which continues to change everything about life and work as we know it. As strange as they are for many, people are learning to follow guidelines on social distancing and isolation.

Innovation and technological advancements have ensured that businesses - including the East London Industrial Development Zone SOC Ltd (ELIDZ) - continue to provide uninterrupted operations / services to their customers throughout this pandemic. Virtual gatherings, remote learning, telehealth, work from home - as nations around the world practice social distancing, technology is what is enabling a sense of normalcy in these strange times.

According to ELIDZ Manager: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Mzuyanda Nontshinga, businesses are forced to adapt through sudden mass shifts in working patterns, market dynamics, supply chains and consumer demand. He added that in these challenging times, it is more important than ever that businesses, logistics and supply chains continue to operate, so that citizens, as well as healthcare workers, can get food, essentials and medical supplies they need to survive and also combat the virus.

“Under these circumstances, technology and digital infrastructure have a critical role to play in keeping the world connected more than ever before. Of course, any business today depends on connectivity, and this global event is testing companies’ abilities to fast track their digital transformation and the will to embrace new ways of working via their use of technology. It is not quite as simple as ensuring that employees have laptops and are empowered to work remotely,” he said.

This new way of working includes working from home, also referred to as virtual / remote working. Luckily, as part of systems optimisation, the ELIDZ had initially taken a business decision to introduce Microsoft Office 365 and Teams. Little did the organisation know what was coming, nevertheless this move benefitted the organisation in its entirety. During the period when the country went on lockdown and the entire workforce of the organisation was forced to work from home, the entire exercise was seamless.

Nontshinga further explained how he and his team had to ensure that the ELIDZ was ready to implement a work from home strategy in line with the efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 within the workplace.

“Once the ELIDZ’s Business Continuity Planning (BCP) Committee took a decision to adopt a work from strategy due to the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic, we had to ensure that work would continue without much or any difficulty. Connections needed to be reliable, secure and stable. Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) needed to have the appropriate amount of bandwidth and throughput available so that they do not hamper employees while trying to make sure that they get a job done. The user experience on business-critical applications needed to achieve the same high standard remotely as it does in the office where it is served by a full fibre connection,” he said.

Employees were provided with secure laptops and upgraded networks and access infrastructures on short notice, including data packages to minimise top-up disruptions.

Understanding cybersecurity risks embedded onto working remotely is crucial for any organisation looking to implement a work from home strategy. Prior to swapping the office for remote workstations, the ELIDZ ICT team called upon laptop users for individual refresher training to help avoid the human element that cybercriminals attempt to exploit.

Furthermore, Nontshinga added that the team had to ensure that the collaboration and video conferencing platform which will be relied upon by the organisation for 90% of the communication was fast and stable, with security built in. “It is all about providing a consistent, quality experience to employees working remotely so that they can operate in the most productive way,” he added.

As companies are plunged further into COVID-19, uncertainties and the health scare that may be brought about by an abrupt decision to return work, they are now realising that enabling this type of agility—being able to switch a business to a distributed workforce almost overnight—requires careful forward planning and preparation. COVID-19 will accelerate digital transformation for many businesses, acting as an unwanted catalyst for change. Where for now the investment may be made in the hope of ensuring business survival, the good news is that for many, investments made today to respond to the virus will help to future proof businesses and equip them for the medium and long-term.

“While this pandemic is arguably a black swan event, COVID-19 is a lesson on the importance of ensuring business agility. As human beings around the world demonstrate their resilience and come together as one to beat this virus, businesses need to demonstrate a similar kind of resilience and corporate agility to see them through this period, adapt to a new normal and come out stronger. Although the situation today is difficult, the skills needed to shift focus will act as good practice for companies facing similar situations in the future.”

There is still quite a lot of room for South African businesses to leverage more digital platforms to ensure that their operations run seamlessly and more effectively. Now is the time for businesses, big and small, to embrace new technologies that can further open up the digital economy whilst also assisting businesses in distress. Likewise, utilising digital infrastructure can empower the country’s economy thus integrating both the physical and digital worlds.

Meanwhile Nontshinga added that one of the notable benefits brought about by the working from home strategy is the introduction of a paperless environment, a massive step towards digitizing the organisation’s operations making the business more eco-friendly. “The introduction of digital signatures for all staff at the beginning of the year has aided the transition to a paperless environment – something which the organisation will maintain even after the lockdown period.”

“At this uncertain time, the businesses and people who can adapt in the smartest ways will make the best of the current climate, and will be well placed to thrive when the world changes again and our planet enters a new chapter – whenever that may be,” concluded Nontshinga.



ELIDZ PROVIDES MUCH NEEDED FOOD RELIEF TO WARD 46 FAMILIES

In the face of hunger threats brought on by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the East London Industrial Development Zone SOC Ltd (ELIDZ) is reaching out to impoverished households within the surrounding communities.

On Wednesday, 17 June 2020 the ELIDZ held an official handover of food vouchers to families from the immediate surrounding communities in Ward 46. The official handover was also attended by ELIDZ Board Members Councillor (Cllr) Pumla Nazo and Cllr Vuyolwethu Gqodi. The initiative, which was rolled out throughout the week, forms part of the organisation's Corporate Social Investment (CSI) drive to bring about much needed relief to a total of 100 families in Ward 46.

The families which were identified through the help of the Ward 46 Cllr, Nceba Kilimani and his committee – included pensioner- and orphaned/child-headed impoverished households. The families were drawn from seven townships within Ward 46, including Sunnyridge Park and Rosemount, Willow Park and Winterstrand, Sunset Bay and Brookwood, Sunnyridge Extension, Leaches Bay, Orange Grove and Santa.

According to the ELIDZ Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mr Simphiwe Kondlo, the organisation took a decision to lend a helping hand in a bid to assist the government in its efforts to support those in dire need during this difficult period.

"Upon realising the hard times many families have fallen into following the outbreak - primarily those that were finding it hard to make ends meet even before the nationwide lockdown - we decided to approach the ward councillor and committee of Ward 46 for assistance with identifying distressed families within the community," said Mr Kondlo.

He added that the organisation is delighted to be part of such an initiative, particularly during these trying times and that the support provided will go a long way in assisting the families.

"To ensure strict adherence to lockdown regulations, the food vouchers were procured at Debi-Lee Spar in Greenfields and an arrangement was made for these to be distributed per township over a period of five days," said Ms Nomsa Makhoba, ELIDZ Executive Manager: Corporate Affairs and CSI Committee Chairperson.

In a bid to control a possible influx of beneficiaries coming to collect their vouchers at one time, the organisation placed a table at the entrance of the store with two officials - one from the Ward 46 Committee and the other from the ELIDZ CSI Committee - to hand out the food vouchers owing to required documentation.

One of the beneficiaries, Ms Thenjiswa Maxegwana, thanked the ELIDZ for stepping up when many organisations turned a blind eye to the plight of the families during the nationwide lockdown. "The ELIDZ's assistance could not have come at a better time – the extension of the lockdown beyond the initial 21 days has dealt many of us a huge blow as our children are no longer able to get part time work like they did before the emergence of COVID-19. My family will now have food on the table," added Ms Maxegwana.

Cllr Kilimani applauded the ELIDZ for the work it continues to do in the surrounding communities.

"We are extremely humbled by the continued relationship with the ELIDZ and its commitment to continue to be a responsible citizen amongst us. Government needs such partners in its efforts to assist distressed families during this ravaging pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic will be with us for quite some time, so we need such meaningful contributions in our communities," said Cllr Kilimani.



ADJUSTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

One thing that is certain, we know that adjusting to change can be challenging. Be it planned or unplanned, gradual or sudden, change is inevitable and very much part of being human. In the past few months, we have experienced an unprecedented shift in our way of life due to novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This wave of change has not only affected human beings, but also society and business at large.

The COVID-19 pandemic has paralysed the world and sentenced citizens to isolation for a protracted period. This global phenomenon has destabilised and crashed numerous health systems across the world as hundreds of thousands are infected with the virus daily. Due to the mandatory self-isolation to curb the spread of the virus and flatten the curve – an exercise recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) – many economies are still coming to terms with the devastating effects of the pandemic.

Accordingly, employers need a comprehensive, dynamic plan for adjusting to the “new normal” when the dust settles, and businesses reopen. They are also faced with the difficult tasks of ramping up their business operations, generating additional revenue, providing a safe work environment for their employees, as well as complying with rapidly evolving regulations from the National Department of Health, National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) and local directives. While every business must tackle its own unique obstacles, there are many common issues related to reopening that all employers should consider carefully as they come to terms with the new normal. The following are a few guidelines that could help your business navigate the new normal:

DEVELOP AND REFINE A DETAILED REOPENING PLAN THAT ACCOUNTS FOR EVOLVING GOVERNMENTAL ORDERS AND AGENCY GUIDANCE

Many employers have little to no experience with a global pandemic, much fewer restarting operations that may have been abruptly shutdown, in whole or in part, as a result of numerous, often-divergent government directives and guidelines across the country. The many hurdles that employers must overcome in reopening their businesses highlight the importance of developing a detailed reopening plan with input from a cross-functional management team. In addition to including necessary operational managers, the team should include, at a minimum, representatives of an employer’s human resources, information and communications technology, risk management, safety and health, and legal departments and should have sufficient authority (or access to authority) to act nimbly and decisively in the face of quickly changing information and circumstances.

DETERMINE WHO COMES BACK TO WORK AND WHEN, HOW AND WHERE

Through the use of a phased approach strategy to easing lockdown guidelines, government is dictating which businesses can reopen and when, in effect creating a rolling reopening, even in different areas within a single province as the state of readiness is continuously monitored.

Because they are already open, essential businesses may have an easier time ramping up their operations more quickly. However, businesses that are permitted or have decided to reopen for the first time since alert Level 5 of the nationwide lockdown must think through the process considering social distancing and other restrictions. You may consider using a number of the following strategies in implementing reopening processes:

- Adopting a rolling return to work strategy by first recalling those workers who either cannot perform their positions remotely or whose on-site presence is more essential or useful to the business, while allowing the remainder of the employees to continue to work remotely. This approach has several benefits, including limiting the number of employees who are exposed to one another during the initial reopening phase and allowing employers to road test their safety precautions and social distancing requirements with a smaller group of employees and make appropriate adjustments
- Starting slowly by initially reopening with one shift and then adding shifts, modifying work operations and shifts to stagger workers across shifts
- Establishing worker cohorts (groupings), which may reduce the risk of workplace transmission by minimizing the number of different individuals who come in close contact with each other
- Staggering arrival, break, and departure times to avoid congregations of workers at the entrance to the workplace, near time clocks, and in parking areas, locker rooms and break rooms.

ADDRESS EMPLOYEE CONCERNS ASSOCIATED WITH RETURNING TO WORK

At this point one should anticipate that some employees may be reluctant to return to work for fear of exposure to the virus, particularly if they or their family members are in high-risk groups, i.e., 60 years of age and above, comorbidities, compromised immune system, or pregnant. Recent regulations by the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) state that employees who are 60 years of age and above, those who have declared comorbidities, compromised immune system, or pregnant may not return to work until it is deemed safe to do so. However, it is the employer’s prerogative to apply all necessary internal policies deemed appropriate.

Employers should also anticipate that other employees may be unable to return to work unless they can find suitable childcare alternatives, as the government has adopted a rolling return to school strategy.

EVALUATE POTENTIAL TESTING AND OTHER SCREENING MEASURES FOR RETURNING EMPLOYEES

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, workplace health testing and temperature screening has become mandatory and a new normal for all employers and employees. Employers are encouraged to adhere to strict regulations provided for by DEL when screening and testing employees. Any testing or other form of health screening needs to be implemented carefully. For example, employers should consider contracting with qualified third parties such as the ELIDZ Clinic Services to administer the testing, bearing in mind that all tests are paid for by the respective employer. Those employers who decide to use their own personnel to conduct testing of returning employees should ensure that such personnel are properly trained in how to perform the tests and protect themselves. Employers must recognize that those conducting the tests may be at greater risk of contracting the virus, such that providing them with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is critically important.

IMPLEMENT ADDITIONAL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Even though it will come at a cost, employers are required to implement additional measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Strategies that businesses can use include:

Conducting workplace hazard assessments: you may identify where and how workers might be exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace by conducting a thorough hazard assessment, in accordance with Occupational Health and Safety Act standards.

Facilitating social distancing: It is recommended that employers establish policies and practices for social distancing (i.e., physical distancing of at least 1.5 to 2 metres between individuals). To do so, employers should consider reconfiguring communal work environments so that workers are at least 1.5 to 2 metres apart in all directions and should close or limit access to common areas where employees are likely to congregate and interact.

Implementing vertical or departmental separation: Depending on the footprint of the workplace, employers may want to consider taking social distancing one step further and restricting access between employees on different floors of a building or in different departments or other geographical areas. If so, employers should consider reconfiguring key card access to accomplish this objective. At the same time, employers should consider staggered workdays, even on the same floor, if, for example, a critical infrastructure team (such as the Information Communication Technology department) all works on the same floor. By switching up workdays at the office, an outbreak may not result in quarantining an entire department.

Reconfiguring space: Employers should examine each space within the workplace in the context of social distancing and consider removing furniture to enforce compliance. For example, in a lobby or waiting room, one may consider placing chairs 1.5 to 2 metres apart and removing sofas. In conference rooms and other large areas where groups previously met, removing chairs may accomplish social distancing. Employers in manufacturing plants will need to consider reconfiguring or retooling production lines so that workers are not working shoulder to shoulder or directly across from one another.

Enhancing disinfection and cleaning protocols: Employers should review their cleaning operations to ensure that frequently touched surfaces (e.g. elevator call buttons, stair railings, door knobs, copy machines, countertops, light switches, phones, keyboards, time clocks, lockers, kitchen appliances, toilets, and faucets) are disinfected more frequently during the pandemic. It also is important to make sure that cleaning personnel are properly trained and equipped to ensure that they are disinfecting all frequently touched areas and that they have appropriate PPE to avoid contracting the coronavirus while cleaning.

Changing crowd flow: Employers should look at crowd flow in the workplace and consider designating one-way entrances / exits and corridors or aisles as has been done in grocery stores.

Revamping communal eating and exercise practices: Employers should consider disallowing, at least temporarily, common use areas for food storage, such as refrigerators, and common use machines for beverage consumption, such as water coolers and coffee machines. Once reopened, those areas should be subjected to strict social distancing requirements and increased disinfection practices.

Reinforcing good hygiene practices: accordingly, you should remind returning employees to take basic preventive measures and safety precautions that may help to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 or spreading it in the workplace, these could be put up in public areas such as toilets.

Personal Protective Equipment and Training: you need to consider what PPE or additional PPE to issue out to employees to wear

when entering the workplace and while working in areas where social distancing is not possible.

ASSESS POTENTIAL CHANGES TO POLICIES ON NONESSENTIAL BUSINESS TRAVEL

Governments across the globe have recommended that as employers look to reopen their businesses, they should assess whether to place limits on nonessential business travel until the pandemic passes in order to reduce employees' potential exposure to COVID-19 and the risk that they may carry the virus asymptotically back to the workplace. Alternative ways to reach out to the international market should be explored such as conducting meetings via video conferencing facilities.

QUARANTINE RETURNING EMPLOYEES WHO EXHIBIT COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

If, upon or after the workplace reopening, an employee returns to work exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms such as coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or a new loss of taste or smell, the employer should send the employee home until the employee has seen a medical practitioner and cleared them to return to work. You may also look into drafting policies to govern contact tracing and provide guidelines regarding notifying other employees of potential workplace exposure.

RESTRICT VISITORS

To guard against transmission you may consider restricting all but essential visitors to the workplace. Essential visitors may not be unaccompanied - i.e., by friends, family and drivers - when entering the workplace and should be required to wear masks or other face coverings in order to enter the workplace. Visitors may be subjected to the same screening and testing procedures administered to employees when entering the facility.

BE MINDFUL OF IMPORTANT PRIVACY ISSUES

Employers who are interfacing with employees in preparing for reopening and protecting their workforce from the spread of COVID-19 may receive different types of employee medical information. Such information often must be treated as confidential as provided for in the Department of Employment and Labour regulations, and employers therefore should ensure that they implement appropriate measures to protect the privacy of employee medical information. Additionally, employers should not disclose to other employees—prior to, during or after reopening—the names of any employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 or exhibited symptoms consistent with the virus. This is true even as to the results of tests or the answers to screening questioning that the employer itself has undertaken. Similarly, while an employer will need to quarantine an employee who returns to work and tests positive for COVID-19 upon reopening (or indicates that he or she recently tested positive for COVID-19), the employer should share the employee's name only with a public health authorities, not with co-workers.

BE PREPARED TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN

It is important to keep yourself abreast with developments around the pandemic, therefore one should be mindful of warnings by public health officials that there may be spikes in COVID-19 cases in the months to come or a second wave of cases in winter, in which case, employers may once again need to implement emergency measures with little warning from national or provincial governments. Accordingly, employers should consider what actions to take now in order to prepare for a potential sequel to the unanticipated events of earlier this year.

As you work to gradually reopen your business, you should look into implementing protocols for screening returning employees, adopt enhanced safety precautions to maintain social distancing and avoid the spread of COVID-19, and communicate and train employees regarding new policies and procedures.

FACT OR FICTION: HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT COVID-19?

Knowing the facts is key to being properly prepared for protecting yourself and your loved ones against the virus.

The Novel Coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. The new virus which has subsequently been named the "COVID-19 virus" has quickly spread across the world like a wildfire. While initially mainly affecting Asia, Europe and North America, more people are now testing positive in Africa and particularly in South Africa and consequently this is also where the largest number of people are affected by HIV.

Misinformation and myths have been spreading fast, so we asked an expert, General Practitioner: Dr Mbuyiselo Nyoka, to share the most common COVID-19 myths and misinformation they have come across following the outbreak of the pandemic.

Here we put the record straight:

SYMPTOMS AND SEVERITY

Will most people who get COVID-19 get very sick or die?

FACT: Most people who get COVID-19 will have a mild form of the illness and recover without needing professional medical care. Around eight out of every 10 people with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms. Around one in six people will become severely ill and need hospital care. Scientific modelling suggests that around 1 in 100 people who get COVID-19 will die.

Can you always tell if someone has COVID-19?

FACT: No, the virus can be in someone's body for up to 14 days before they get symptoms, and some people will have such a mild case of COVID-19 that they might not notice that anything is wrong. That is why it is important that everyone follows government advice – including hand washing, using tissues to catch coughs and sneezes, and avoiding crowds – to stop the spread of the virus, even if they feel healthy.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Can black and African people get COVID-19?

FACT: Anyone can get COVID-19, regardless of race or skin colour. Older people and people with other health conditions, such as asthma, heart diseases and diabetes, are more at risk of getting seriously ill.

Does COVID-19 only affect old people, meaning young people do not have to worry?

FACT: While COVID-19 can be more dangerous in older people, anyone can get it including young people, some of whom become seriously ill. While we do not yet fully understand why some people get more serious symptoms, we do know that young people are more likely to develop serious symptoms if they have certain underlying health conditions, for example, asthma, heart conditions or untreated HIV.

Are people living with HIV more likely to get seriously ill?

FACT: If you are living with HIV and on effective treatment there is no evidence that you are at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 symptoms. This is because your treatment will be keeping your immune system strong and your body able to deal with infections. If you are worried that you might have HIV, now is a good time to get tested so you can start treatment if you need it.

PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND CURE

Will antiretroviral treatment (ART) for HIV stop me getting COVID-19?

FACT: There is no evidence that taking anti-HIV drugs will stop you getting COVID-19. Although some ART drugs are being trialled for use to treat COVID-19, there is no scientific evidence yet that they are indeed effective for this purpose.

If you are living with HIV and taking treatment, it is important that you follow the general advice to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Keep taking your treatment to ensure your immune system stays strong. You should not share your HIV drugs with anyone else who has COVID-19 or is worried about getting it. These should only be taken if prescribed by a doctor.

Can COVID-19 spread in warm sunny weather?

FACT: COVID-19 can survive temperatures higher than 25°C. You can catch it no matter how sunny and warm it is. So, whatever the weather you should follow the official advice to protect yourself from the virus.

Getting out into the sunshine, if you can, is still a good idea as this helps your body produce vitamin D which is important for your immune system.

Will drinking lots of hot drinks stop COVID-19?

FACT: There is no drink, hot or cold, that will protect you from COVID-19 or cure the illness. So far, there is no proven cure for COVID-19 but most people recover by themselves. Taking paracetamol, drinking lots of liquids, and getting enough rest can help you manage your symptoms.

Should I use a strong disinfectant to clean my hands and body to protect myself from COVID-19?

FACT: You should not use strong disinfectant to clean your body. Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and water or rubbing an alcohol-based sanitizer on them will stop the virus spreading. Using stronger chemicals on your skin can be dangerous. Never drink disinfectant or hand sanitizer as this can cause serious damage.

Can chloroquine cure COVID-19?

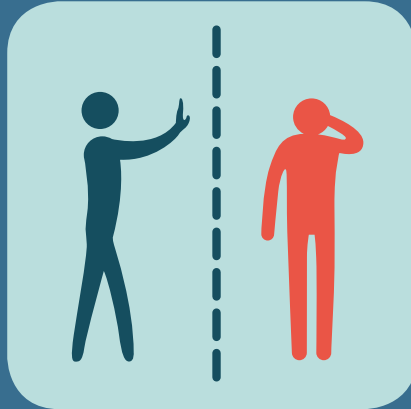
FACT: At the moment, there is no proven cure for COVID-19, but most people will recover on their own without needing professional medical care. If you think you have COVID-19 and are having difficulty breathing, contact your local health facility as you will need professional medical care.

As scientists and doctors continue their work to understand and treat COVID-19, our knowledge of, and ability to treat and prevent the virus will improve. For now, it is important to follow official government advice and get information only from reliable sources like the National Department of Health, National Institute for Communicable Diseases and the World Health Organisation.

COVID-19 PREVENTION



**WASH HANDS FOR
AT LEAST 20 SECONDS**



**AVOID CONTACT WITH
SICK PEOPLE**



**DO NOT SHARE EATING
UTENSILS AND FOOD**



**AVOID TOUCHING EYES,
NOSE OR MOUTH**



**KEEP OBJECTS AND
SURFACES CLEAN**



**AVOID CROWDED
PLACES**



**COVER YOUR NOSE AND MOUTH
WITH TISSUE OR ELBOW**



**PUT TISSUES IN THE TRASH
BIN AND WASH HANDS**

PERFECT PRECISION

**THE ELIDZ SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY PARK CONSULTING
AND ANALYTICAL SERVICES (CAS) LABORATORY**



The **East London IDZ CAS Laboratory**, a SANAS No T626 accredited laboratory, has highly skilled and trained staff with sophisticated state of the art instrumentation. The laboratory's capabilities of analysing water samples range from potable quality to industry effluents and waste sample leachates. As such, the laboratory is fully equipped to carry out wastewater characterisation as per the Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism regulations.

The ELIDZ CAS Lab's Services are but not limited to the following:

- *Surface water analysis (Rivers, lakes, dams, pools)*
- *Groundwater analysis (Boreholes, wells, spring water)*
- *Drinking water analysis (Tap water, Bottled water, treated surface or ground water)*
- *Waste water analysis*
- *Inorganic analysis - major cations/anions*
- *Physico chemical analysis*
- *Organic analysis*
- *Microbiological analysis*
- *Borehole water quality testing and analysis*
- *Metal Scan*

Chemical Analysis Offered

- *pH*
- *Electrical Conductivity*
- *Ammonia*
- *Chemical Oxygen Demand*
- *Total Alkalinity*

Microbiological Analysis Offered

- *Heterotrophic Plate Count*
- *Faecal Coliforms*
- *Total Coliforms*
- *E.Coli*

14 ACCREDITED
METHODS
OFFERED BY
THE LAB.

SANAS ACCREDITED



**TRAINING &
PRACTICAL**
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